

VZCZCXRO7842
RR RUEHROV
DE RUEHAE #0931 3441233
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 101233Z DEC 07
FM AMEMBASSY ASMARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9310
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0034
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1539
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1717
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0675
RUMICEA/JICCENT MACDILL AFB FL
RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 000931

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/09/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [EAGR](#) [KOLY](#) [ER](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: CHINESE IN ERITREA SEEK ACTIVE ROLE

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The Chinese Ambassador to Eritrea, Shu Zhan, says he and his mission seek to play a more active role in Eritrea than had the Chinese Embassy in the past. Regarding President Isaias' experience in China during the throes of the Cultural Revolution, Shu said that "perhaps he learned the wrong lessons." End Summary.

12. (C) Chinese Youth Volunteers in Eritrea

During a December 6 discussion with the Ambassador, Shu said China had recently sent ten Youth Volunteers and three professional technicians to assist with Eritrea's development. Five volunteers will work on agricultural projects in Tesseney (near the Sudanese border), two would be stationed in Mendeferra, south of Asmara, and three would be in Asmara coaching women's soccer, table tennis, and "ground tennis." He thought Eritrea would participate in the Beijing Olympics in bicycling and middle distance running. The three professional experts would be attached to the Ministry of Agriculture in Asmara, Shu added.

13. (C) Young Isaias Afwerki in China

When the Ambassador raised President Isaias' experience as an ELF Political Commissar trainee in China in 1966-67, Shu commented that he had discussed it with Isaias. He reported that Isaias said he heartily disliked Chairman Mao's cult of personality. Shu, who as a college graduate was forced to work as an agricultural laborer for five years to overcome his bourgeois background, offered that perhaps Isaias "had learned the wrong lessons" from his visit to China during the darkest days of the Cultural Revolution, an apparent reference to Isaias' Maoist economic tendencies.

14. (C) A More Active Chinese Embassy

Ambassador Shu Zhan, who taught (or was resident) for a semester at George Mason University, said he wanted the Chinese Embassy to be much more active than it had been in the past. He explained that he was the first Chinese

Ambassador to Eritrea who was not in the "59 Club" (i.e., not on a sunset tour facing mandatory retirement). He said he is moderately ambitious, adding that his mentor was "number six" in the overall Chinese political hierarchy, and "would reach number one in five to ten years." Shu said his commercial attache, who lives next door to the American EMR, was currently "in the south" to assess prospects of proposed commercial ventures.

MCMULLEN